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REVIEW OF STUDY ABROAD LIVING ARRANGEMENTS:  
ITS IMPLICATION ON AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC GAINS

by

VIKTORIA ZAGORSKI

Under the Direction of Victoria Rodrigo, PhD

## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes study abroad programs and its living arrangements and the benefits it poses on students' comprehension. It emphasizes the various motivational and linguistic factors involved in the process, as well as the many advantages and disadvantages study abroad programs may present for the student. Ultimately, throughout the research, one can see the benefits study abroad students present as compared to those in an at home foreign-language classroom setting.

INDEX WORDS: Study Abroad, Comprehension, Linguistic Factors, Motivational Factors, Living Arrangements

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by

VIKTORIA ZAGORSKI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2019

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2019

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ITS IMPLICATION ON AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC GAINS

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VIKTORIA ZAGORSKI

Committee Chair: Dr. Victoria Rodrigo

Committee: Dr. Carmen Hermann

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2019

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my family who've been there throughout this whole process. My parents, Jorge and Victoria, who've always supported me unconditionally despite any crazy, rebellious ideas I may have. My siblings, Mariano, Maxi, and Halina who've also been there through the many challenges. I would also like to dedicate it to my boyfriend, Liam, who's helped me through the many obstacles and was always available throughout this process, guiding me and providing me with constructive criticism.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 COMPREHENSION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS – WHY STUDY ABROAD? .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.1 Study abroad vs. semester at home.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.2 Foreign Language Housing: Host Families vs. Dorms.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4 AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF STUDY ABROAD.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4.1 Affective Factors: Motivation and Anxiety .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4.2 Linguistic Factors .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>5 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>43</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The advantages and disadvantages of different language-learning contexts: study abroad vs. at-home experience. ....	17
Table 2. Foreign Language Housing vs. Dorm Accommodation.....	21

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

STUDY ABROAD (SA)

FOREIGN LANGUAGE (FL)

NATIVE LANGUAGE (NL)

NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS (NNSs)

NATIVE SPEAKERS (NSs)

TARGET LANGUAGE (TL)

SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)

AT HOME (AH)

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humans have had one goal in mind: to understand and communicate. Communication has been our tool; it allows us to express our wants, needs, and feelings. It allows us as well to negotiate a meaning reaching a common goal and understanding. Mobility throughout history has prompted humans to explore new territories and cultures, allowing, thus, to discover new languages. Both communication and mobility have since allowed for the expansion and learning of foreign languages.

The practice of acquiring a foreign language is not new; neither is traveling for the sole purpose of learning a language; nevertheless, the methods available to its learners keep improving. However, one theory has never been disputed: language immersion. Language immersion is best experienced when living in the country and dealing with its native speakers. The experience of living in another country and being able to understand and communicate does not compare to learning the language in the home country. Pragmatically, it never will. In the education field, study abroad programs have gained momentum since the 1980s (Rodrigo, 2011, p. 502) and importance amongst students, as well as professors in order to rapidly acquire, and comprehend a foreign language. Taking a semester abroad, rather than a foreign language (FL) course at home for a semester, is more appealing - and a better option - given the ever-increasing availability of input in order to further develop comprehension, as well as the ever-increasing list of countries available.

Study abroad encompasses the idea of immersing oneself in both the language and the benefits associated with it; it gives the student a global – or intercultural –

competence described by Francisco Salgado-Robles (2018), following the Instituto Cervantes definition, he describes comprehension as follows:

[...] la habilidad de un aprendiz de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera (LE) para desenvolverse adecuada y satisfactoriamente en las situaciones de comunicación que se producen con frecuencia en la sociedad actual caracterizada por la pluriculturalidad. (p. 29)

It is of particular interest in this article the idea that intercultural competence means to develop a foreign language in communicative situations and to be able to “get by” in this language, thus, creating an environment where comprehension is not only a benefit but rather, essential. Taking into consideration the idea that foreign language can also be learned at home, we must analyze and further explore the linguistic benefits that a study abroad program may bring, as well as its negative aspects, particularly, the - somewhat oblivious - idea that previous foreign language knowledge is obsolete in order to participate in these programs. Meaning that sometimes the basic previous language knowledge besets the possibilities of furthering the students' comprehension in the foreign language.

This thesis will focus on the advantages of studying abroad for the comprehension and production of the FL, particularly in the Spanish language, and Spanish-taught contexts, as well as whether studying abroad is genuinely beneficial. Throughout the bibliography, it is evident that there is a trend in agreeing that students gain a particular cultural experience and knowledge. However, studies differ on whether the students benefit from the comprehension and oral production aspects. Students vary in level and outcomes, and, according to their level, they either feel an improvement or notice no

significant progress. Regardless, the programs seem to be beneficial as an overall experience, particularly, in being exposed to the foreign language and culture, therefore, creating a learning environment malleable for each student who partakes on this adventure. Comprehension and production being the main aspirations of studying abroad; its outcomes influence the student progress in the FL. Depending on their experience, and their outcomes, the student will either be influenced by the language and culture, or not, and continue further studies in the language.

This study will not only focus on the benefits but also the many linguistic and nonlinguistic obstacles faced by the student throughout the study abroad programs. The main priority is to determine the availability of resources and the benefits associated with the progression of all components: the student, the program, and the further engagement and study of the language. Linguistic gains and motivation - cultural experience included - are in essence the primary purpose of these programs, and to further progress students in this department and realm there needs to be an incentive for the future survival of these programs. Language learning is a valuable experience. All components encompass a globalized student, as well as the further study of the language academically. It breaks down cultural barriers and sets students for an enriching future. It internalizes the idea of a more diverse and understanding community, hence promoting language and study abroad programs further in academic contexts.

In an attempt to further promote the idea of study abroad, the current study will examine the various types of study abroad contexts. It will compare them to at-home foreign language study settings and whether or not their gains are comparable. The

study will centre itself on the benefits that participating in a study abroad program may provide the student in terms of comprehension and oral production. It will examine the setting, as well as the motivational and linguistic factors associated with the students' stay abroad. Additionally, it will examine the many advantages and disadvantages within the various scenarios. Arguably, it may be difficult to base the students' language competence in just a study abroad context. By examining comprehension at the base of language acquisition in this context, it is possible to overgeneralize and assume that while abroad a students' language faculty ultimately develops. Nevertheless, in order to find an answer, one must first define comprehension. Why is communication such an essential aspect of our daily lives? Moreover, is comprehension essential - if not our main priority - in foreign language learning? Why is comprehension important?

## **2 COMPREHENSION**

In essence, comprehension means to be able to understand and to be understood. Comprehension is defined as "the ability to understand something" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019), meaning that there is a yearning to understand the message, and provide some meaningful interactions between individuals. Communication which will eventually lead to an understanding and a collective meaning. Foreign language comprehension does not diverge.

Nevertheless, comprehension involves different processes, particularly, having acquired a first language. Language comprehension usually involves processes of output and input and may develop in the early stages going as far as saying that "infants show discrimination between two languages very early. Memory for language sounds

even operates in the fetal stage [...]” (Baker, 2011, p.95). Sound discrimination develops very early, thus the essence of comprehension. Discriminating sounds is the first step toward language comprehension, further leading to second language sound discrimination and, eventually, comprehension. The concept of comprehension as the main focus for foreign language development may seem far-fetched and is often overlooked, particularly by its learners. Nonetheless, it is the main focus of the following research.

Comprehension and SA programs complement each other. In order to better perform in an L2, one must immerse himself in the language and culture. SA programs offer the opportunity for students to travel and immerse themselves in all aspects of the language learning experience. The idea of engaging in a SA language program involves some previous L2 knowledge. Nevertheless, as Krashen (1985) describes in his book *The Input Hypothesis: issues and implications*:

“we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others late. The order does not appear to be determined solely by formal simplicity and there is evidence that it is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes.” (p. 1)

Meaning that language acquisition happens in a linear order. Some rules may be acquired first, while others may take more time. Whether it is our mother tongue or not, certain rules will develop by listening, while others by deducting patterns. Krashen (1985) also mentions that in order to acquire an L2, there needs to be a basic language knowledge, and input needs to be “a step above” what the learner’s level currently is (p. 2). “We are able to understand language containing unacquired grammar with the help



of context, which includes extra linguistic information, our knowledge of the world and previously acquired linguistic competence.” (Krashen, 1985, p.2).

SA exposes the student to authentic input and advanced grammatical structures unforeseen by the student while at home. By exposing them and immersing them in the L2, the learners slowly but steadily acquire a more solid language base. Krashen (1982) notes that “one of the most exciting discoveries in language acquisition research in recent years has been the finding that the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order” (p. 12). Hence, basic L2 knowledge help the students abroad better perform. Immersing them in the TL exposes them to new structures and language above their level. Thus, the student has to use context to negotiate and deduce meaning. By exposing the student to new experiences and new grammatical structures, we instigate a desire to learn and engage in the community. Thus, students choosing to break their barriers and participate in study abroad programs.

### **3 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS – WHY STUDY ABROAD?**

The concept of studying abroad is not new, Merriam-Webster describes it as studying beyond the boundaries of one's own country, meaning that one must leave their own country to experience new languages, as well as cultures. Though originally “conceived in the mid-twentieth century as a way for young middle-class women to become more eligible for marriage or just as a pastime for wealthy young ladies, which explains the historical predominance of female students in SA programmes” (Galindo, 2018, p. 373), “The last two decades have seen an increase in the demand for more

accountability in education in the US and abroad. Language and culture programs including study abroad (SA) programs have been no exception in this respect” (Ecke, 2014, p.121) and this list keeps expanding, with the numbers of students - as well as the number of countries available - wanting an international experience rising rapidly every year. Whether students are looking to improve their language capabilities, gain international experience, travel abroad, or gain some cultural understanding, these are benefits the programs comprise. With the ever-so-increasing list of available countries, students can profit from first-hand interaction and from the effects of globalization, which enables students’ greater access to these meaningful opportunities. Thus “saying the world is getting smaller is not only a cliché, but like so many clichés, it is absolutely true” (Markle, 1992, p. 720). Moreover, although there is an increasing demand of students wanting to study abroad, these programs are limited in both capacity and time, limiting as well the effects of a foreign language acquisition, which are “further exacerbated by the often short duration of the immersion experience: Recent statistics attest to the increasing number of U.S. students selecting short-term stays over semester-long programs” (Hernandez, 2017, p.390). In order to gain enough experience to further their career prospects in future endeavours. These short term endeavours may only slightly benefit the students in their linguistic capacities, but rather give them an overall cultural awareness and experience, further enabling their comprehension of the foreign language and their future studies upon their return.

The international experience may not only be sought-after by the students, but rather their foreign language professors promoting the programs, with “more and more faculty, administrators, and employers consider[ing] international experience an

essential part of students' preparation for their future lives and are pushing for students to enhance their education by spending time studying abroad" (Martinsen, 2011, p.121). Study abroad has almost become a norm when studying a foreign language at the university level, further promoting the idea of immersing oneself in other culture and language to further students' linguistic ability, it has somewhat become an "important component of the language and culture curriculum in the preparation of University students in the US" (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009, p. 41) which normalizes the connection between cultures and further supports the idea of a globalized society. SA comprises all these benefits, that is why "it is often been said that in order to develop advanced skills in a foreign language, one must go abroad" (Dewey, 2007, p. 245).

Unfortunately, there is no urge or compelling need for Americans to learn a second language (Markle, 1992, p.72). However, given the extent of technology and the media, and the availability of languages through it, more and more Americans are choosing to partake in these programs through their universities. According to Rodrigo (2011), since study abroad programs became popular in the 1980s, and universities were promoting and incentivizing students, more and more students are choosing to participate in these. Indeed, those languages most commonly taught in American universities, such as Spanish, comprise the most common destinations for students getting involved in these programs (Martinsen, 2011, p. 121). Spanish is the most taught language at US institutions, as well as Spanish-speakers being the primary source of immigration into the country, enables the students with a more "home-like" view and a deeper understanding of cultural experience. Given the state of immigration and the availability

of the Spanish language in everyday contexts, students feel a deeper “connection” to it than to other languages.

The essence of study abroad programs encompasses the idea of immersion into the foreign language and culture, further expanding the students’ linguistic ability in the latter. Rodrigo (2011) mentions:

A nivel lingüístico, la investigación sugiere que el contexto de inmersión acelera el proceso de aprendizaje debido a que el aprendiz tiene más oportunidad de estar expuesto a la lengua que quiere aprender. Además, cuando se vive en el país de la lengua que se estudia, el entorno lingüístico, o input, al que se está expuesto es más natural y provee más oportunidades para interaccionar y negociar con la lengua (p.502).

In the latter, we can highlight how a student’s ability rapidly increases while studying abroad, given the never-ending opportunities to listen and interact in the foreign language. Study abroad and immersion go hand-in-hand in enabling students to gain further and develop their linguistic abilities. Thus, ultimately achieving their foreign language goals and those of the University.

In the United States, as aforementioned, study abroad programs have gained momentum; nevertheless, The Chronicle of Higher Education (2019) suggests that the 2008 recession seems to have hit foreign-language programs the worst, and its effects are still lingering. Spanish programs, however, seem to still be successful at most institutions, as well as the primary destination for American students wanting to experience a different culture. According to Martinsen (2011), “participation in study abroad is increasing rapidly among college students in the United States, and Spanish

and Portuguese-speaking countries are amongst the most popular destinations. Of the twenty most commonly visited countries by students from the United States, seven were Spanish and Portuguese-speaking” (p. 121).

### **3.1 Study abroad vs. semester at home**

As previously discussed, study abroad programs have successfully promoted and attained a level of comprehension otherwise challenging to reach. However, there is also the idea of doing a semester at home (AH) and the advantages that this may present compared to a semester - or year - abroad. Comprehension and production, as the focus of this research, may suffer various consequences deriving from lack of previous language knowledge and poverty of L2 stimuli, hence losing both the language benefits and the students’ further pursuing the language.

Engaging in a Spanish-speaking abroad program enables its American participants to further engage in their community when back. However, that is not to disprove the benefits of taking part in a semester-long Spanish course. The benefits encountered by students participating in both are various; however, the benefits of studying abroad last longer than those students choosing to study an L2 (second language) at home (Lafford, 2006, p. 1). Moreover, Lafford (2006) mentions that even the L2 linguistic benefits of partaking in an immersion class at home do not seem to fully compare to those acquired when on a study abroad program, even if it is only for a semester abroad.

Although linguistic factors may seem present in every aspect of language learning, study abroad presents both students and instructors with a broader range of

gains. Study abroad is often seen as the “mecca” of language and cultural learning. To experience a language and immerse oneself in it presents both different challenges and benefits for the student.

SA contexts have traditionally been assumed to be the best environments in which to acquire a second language and understand their culture. Indeed, for many years American language instructors and university administrators believed that participating in a “junior year abroad” experience and living with host families from the target culture would not only broaden students’ cultural horizons, but would also help them to become “fluent” speakers of the language, with more improvement in their target language (L2) pronunciation, grammar (morphosyntactic) usage, vocabulary knowledge and discursive abilities than those learners who stayed at home and acquired the target language in the classroom. (Lafford, 2006, p.1)

To our advantage, studying abroad encompasses all the abilities taught in a FL classroom setting, plus the idea of acquiring the cultural knowledge often lacked in this setting.

Further discussion on the subject involves prior language context and how is this to be defined when acquiring an L2 (Lafford, 2006, p.3). How can context be taught in an at-home (AH) environment? Is it affected by different factors? Context seems to be affected by both cognitive and social factors, connected to experiences and emotions (Lafford, 2006, p. 3). The sociocultural perspective innately present in the SA program provides students with a more wholesome understanding rather than those at home. It presents the students with the cultural, societal, and linguistic contexts otherwise omitted in the AH environment. Social cues present in native speakers are not the same

as those presented during in-class videos or audios, besides the fact that some teachers may not be native speakers and may also lack these social cues. It is essential for language learners to learn cues in the TL for further advancement in the latter. Comprehension is not only related to meaning while listening, but also to visual cues and context.

Amount of exposure to the input and comprehension may also vary in both environments. Students in an AH environment may be presented with several audios, videos, in addition to the class taught entirely in the TL (target language). Many studying abroad may be looking to “perfect” or further their L2 skills already acquired in an -or several - AH semester. Nevertheless, regardless of how confident they feel with their language skills, many of them will face a striking reality: their skills may be useless. “Listening comprehension presents many challenges to instructed learners, particularly when they first arrive at the locale of their sojourn abroad” (Kinging, 2009, p. 29). Their AH “pedagogical” language use has not been tailored to the social cues or contexts mentioned in the latter. Students realize their comprehension is scarce and they must adapt and ultimately “survive” to progress. After this experience, however, and according to Kinginger (2009), “students often claim that they have made important strides in their ability to understand spoken language” (p. 29) resulting in more significant gains and more fluid language production.

The AH experience of language learning, however, is not as bad as it is put out to be here. AH learners do present several advantages otherwise lost in study abroad participants, particularly when it comes to grammatical features and reading

comprehension. AH language learning can involve either immersion<sup>1</sup> or classroom-only language learning. Both these methods vary and provide different benefits for the student, though none compare to the study abroad language experience.

The AH context is the study of the language in a formal classroom setting. The students are subjected to university L2 courses over several hours a week. They are mostly comprising of sentence structure, comprehensible input, and basic grammar rules. The type of input that the students receive is comparable to that of a SA, meaning it is comprehensible, extensive input comprising authentic materials, and “authentic” language throughout the day. However, the disadvantage lies that the speech is mostly formal and lacks the variation, fluidity, and have little chance of hearing different vocabulary, and variety in the same contexts (Lafford, 2006, p.5). A lack of authentic speech and pre-recorded activities, as well as the fact that most of their communication is with NNSs (non-native speakers) whose level is comparable, in addition to sometimes a lack of TL use, makes immersion or in-class learning settings a challenge. Nevertheless, the student in this AH setting can formulate an answer, is not pressured, and his/her “working memory is not overtaxed with too much target language input to retain and process” (Lafford, 2006, p. 5).

Language learning in both scenarios faces its challenges, particularly when having to use or comprehend the TL. Kinginger (2009) notes that “the study abroad participants made more gain than the classroom learners overall, but they reported relatively little use of French as compared with the immersion students” (p.29). For instance, many

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<sup>1</sup> According to Baker (2011), immersion is a form of bilingual education with an initial emphasis on the L2 (p. 210).



students partaking in study abroad programs, regardless of time spent abroad, choose to communicate in English avoiding the use and practice of the TL. Why is this so? According to Rodrigo (2011), they may be shy, face personal struggles (p. 503), or have an overexposure to the language rendering them inefficient or insecure. Nevertheless, there is an important factor drawn upon us thanks to globalization: English as *lingua franca* or *de facto*. English has become the favoured language in intercultural contexts, particularly when traveling. Kinginger (2009) mentions that:

English has become the acknowledged *lingua mundi*, a language that is in regular use and high demand throughout the world. This phenomenon has several consequences [particularly] for American language learners abroad. First, they will find it increasingly difficult to find both informal and formal situations where they may practice their foreign language. Among international students in Europe, such as ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) participants, English often overpowers the local language as the preferred medium for social interaction. (p.75)

English has been solidly the language of business for years and has rapidly spread due to its availability in social media platforms, as well as the internet. The international use of English abroad may affect student's ability to interact in the TL, given the higher level of English speakers abroad. English as a foreign language or as a second language is usually taught abroad from a young age, enabling foreigners to communicate with each other, interact, study, and find jobs abroad. An American student studying abroad in Spain, and with basic TL knowledge, will choose to interact in his native language. Thus, in the end, language knowledge has a limited

improvement. Though the opportunity may sometimes present itself, most NSs (native speakers) will choose to partake in a conversation in English, creating little opportunities for the SA participants to reinforce their previously learned language skills. Most students, however, do benefit from other activities while abroad. "Reading, watching television, listening to the radio were valued, but evidently by fewer participants than the conversation at the dinner table, travel and service encounters" (Kaplan, 1989, p. 294). These encounters provide students with authentic language input as much as real-life encounters with NS. Their comprehension may improve; nevertheless, there is little context or social cues for the student to guide himself in order to improve their FL comprehension. They may face challenges with vocabulary words or context, and their language production will be negligent.

The issue of English as a *de facto* language, though exemplary and convenient when dealing with different cultures, faces several challenges for the student, where NS or even the host family will want to practice or "perfect" their English skills. Hence, the SA participant is faced with little opportunity to interact in the TL, and hence comprehension is profoundly affected. Kinginger (2009) mentions that the issue is not new, in fact, in the 1980s when traveling abroad, many sojourners faced similar challenges, where most people in the host country chose to engage in a conversation in English (p. 75). This reality affects not only students but also the FL instructors and the study abroad programs due to the limited availability to practice the language abroad, suppressing the students' further interest in learning the language, particularly those with English as a native tongue.

In reality, if we choose to compare, both AH and SA contexts face its challenges, mainly when practicing the TL. Though the lack of authentic materials, in addition to that of authentic speech, AH students do have the advantage of being able to practice the TL with their peers. The level of proficiency may vary, and vocabulary may be limited, but the opportunity of using English is more restrictive. SA students face a more fluid, authentic speech and pronunciation, which plays to their advantage; nevertheless, English may overpower their need to practice the L2.

Whether or not the student decides to engage in a SA program, they will benefit from the language exposure from both settings. Nevertheless, for a foreign language student to better their abilities in the TL, it is recommended they participate in such a program given the endless opportunities they will have of authentic input and language practice. Language immersion in the host country presents the student countless opportunities for language improvement. Ranging from the availability of authentic input in everyday life to cultural understanding and awareness. If a SA student engages with the surrounding community, such as choosing a host-family stay, motivational and linguistic factors will increase. Hence, TL comprehension and production further evolves as well.

In Table 1, one can see the comparison between both scenarios and the advantages and disadvantages they both present to the student engaging in either. Study abroad contexts offer students a wider range of advantages in terms of authentic language input and acquisition. Nevertheless, English as a *de facto* language may decrease or disturb the student's language acquisition.

*Table 1. The advantages and disadvantages of different language-learning contexts: study abroad vs. at-home experience.*

Study Abroad	At home experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immersion in the TL</li> <li>• More wholesome understanding of cultural, societal, and linguistic factors.</li> <li>• Must adapt language skills and “survive” abroad.</li> <li>• More linguistic gains.</li> <li>• English as <i>de facto</i> language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom experience allows for L2 learning with people with similar language skills.</li> <li>• Lack of authentic input.</li> <li>• Lack of cultural knowledge.</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Foreign Language Housing: Host Families vs. Dorms

Studying abroad does not just involve joining in classes and activities abroad in order to further improve the L2. Various research - such as Kinginger’s study of SA students in France - has drawn upon how Foreign Language Housing (FLH) and dorm stays can affect a student’s further L2 comprehension and language production. FLH involves staying with a host family while studying abroad, whereas dorm living involves staying at the visiting university’s residence either surrounded by students engaging in the same program or native speakers (NS) pursuing their studies at the university and residing in the latter.

In theory, one must assume that FLH will be more beneficial for the student, given the ample of opportunities for him or her to practice, as well as the authentic input provided by the host family. Nevertheless, FLH involves many challenges as well: the host family could, as aforementioned, use the student as a practice tool to improve their English abilities. It could also include the SA participants lack previous knowledge and comforting him or herself in his native language (NL). According to Martinsen et al (2011), "Many colleges in North America employ foreign language housing (FLH) as a means of exposing students to a second language (L2)" (p. 274) meaning that there is a consensus that derives from the idea that FLH will provide more opportunities for comprehensible input.

Foreign language housing is not only successful if the match between family and student is right, but it also involves the students' efforts and their involvement in language production and learning. Though the program may require the student to have a homestay with a local family, there may be difficulties that arise for the latter. Their intent and motivation to learn the language may affect their further comprehension and language production. Many students choose SA programs in order to travel and get to see the world, rather than for educational purposes. American colleges may or may not count their grades, but rather their credits for the class - meaning a Pass or Fail would be enough. Foreign language housing may have no influence when the student presents no real need or desire to learn the language and engages in English or conversations in their native language. FLH housing, however, "affords the learners opportunities for frequent, informal interactions in the target language" (Martinsen et al., 2011, pp. 275). The opportunities and benefits the FLH student and resident faces are

higher than those in an AH setting. They may have informal, as well as unintended input, meaning they will hear the TL even if they choose to communicate in their NL. Their level of language knowledge, syntactic structures and well as grammatical knowledge may be far more advanced than someone residing in a university residence with other students participating in the program. Their language input and output opportunities increase, thus enhancing their language skills, and most importantly their confidence in the L2.

American students studying abroad may, nevertheless, face unexpected or conflicting situations while living with a family abroad. The students may be sheltered or expected to gain a “certain level of maturity” (Kinging, 2009, p. 9) while studying abroad, rather than language skills, and a more globalized, cultural, and compassionate view of the world. Besides, “Non-native speakers (NNS) provide most of the input” (Martinsen et al., 2011, p. 275), hence partaking in a homestay abroad provides students with the most authentic input. These students may face an unforeseen situation which may render them ineffective or shelter them from partaking in further activities with NS. Kinginger (2009) mentions that Americans studying abroad may particularly face this given that “The United States may be viewed with admiration or mistrust but is rarely viewed with indifference, and these perceptions place American students in a unique position both to suffer indignities and to learn language” (p. 9). The students may have their perception of the host family or host culture, but this is reciprocal given the presence of America in the modern world. They may base their ideas on stereotypes and feel indifference or hostility toward and from their hosts. FLH does try to break down these stereotypes and break cultural barriers. Nevertheless, this

all does influence the student's further comprehension and knowledge of the language. Hostile environments, particularly the hosts, will prevent the student from furthering their knowledge by limiting the possibility of interaction in the TL. Table 2 presents the advantages and disadvantages of both living abroad scenarios.

In addition to the various advantages FLH may present, it also has several disadvantages. Students participating in the programs may not connect with their hosts. Their cultural shock, previous stereotypes, as well as the many challenges that being abroad by oneself may present, they may put up "barriers" and block the TL and host culture out. They may have difficulty connecting with their host families given the many differences between them. The host family could confront the student with feelings of resentment or apprehension that may arise given the students nationality. The students', particularly the American students, may be faced with a striking reality: indifference. They may portray superiority only to be faced with resentment, ultimately, "cutting themselves off from the very people who are most likely to nurture their language learning" (Kinging, 2009, p. 9).

*Table 2. Foreign Language Housing vs. Dorm Accommodation*

<b>Advantages</b>		<b>Disadvantages</b>	
<b>FLH</b>	<b>Dorm</b>	<b>FLH</b>	<b>Dorm</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promising target language learning environment.</li> <li>• Host family-student interaction</li> <li>• Greater language availability.</li> <li>• Cultural understanding.</li> <li>• May appease culture shock.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in conversation with NS.</li> <li>• Engage in activities.</li> <li>• Facilitates meeting other students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misinterpretation</li> <li>• Alienation from family, activities, and culture.</li> <li>• Student's involvement plays a major role.</li> <li>• Student used as an "English teacher".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of mother tongue.</li> <li>• Lack of native speakers in dorms.</li> <li>• Students are not separated according to language.</li> <li>• Culture shock.</li> </ul>

While foreign language housing may be the preferred way of informal interaction and input, students also face the possibility of dorm stays while abroad. Dorm accommodation may be enticing to students given the opportunities to be with their hometown friend, party, and meet new local students. Regardless, of the opportunities



the student believes he/she will have, dorm accommodations have a downfall. The majority of the students living in a dorm tend to use their native language more often than those at a homestay. FLH encompasses the idea of university dormitory or residence hall stay abroad; however, students may not be in the presence of NS, but their peers. “FLH may take the shape of large dormitories in which residents have no access to NSs and students are not separated according to the target language” (Martinsen et al., 2011, p. 286) which is conclusive with our previous statement: students will choose to engage in conversations in their NL. Another disadvantage involving dormitory is the culture shock these students may experience when they first encounter a NS. Partaking in daily activities with a host family may ease the cultural difference and appease the students’ timidity (Martinsen et al., 2011, p. 286).

Nevertheless, dormitory accommodations also have benefits for the student. While living in a university residence at the foreign university the student may be incentivized to engage in conversation or activities with other students further promoting their language knowledge. It may be the idea of basic commands or listening to people engage in conversations, hence improving their listening skills by introducing new structures to their vocabulary. The linguistic benefits involved are more significant for these students than those taking a semester at home. Lafford and Isabelli (2019), offer insight into the FLH trend and its benefits in their study, where they survey FLH and students L2 improvements:

De los 12 directores que respondieron a la pregunta sobre el efecto del tipo de alojamiento sobre los resultados lingüísticos de los estudiantes de PREE, diez

(83%) percibieron una diferencia notable en los logros idiomáticos entre los estudiantes que optaron por vivir con hispanohablantes nativos (familia anfitriona o apartamentos con HN) y los estudiantes que vivieron con hablantes de inglés y/o pasando más tiempo hablando en inglés que en español con sus interlocutores (p. 508).

As we may remark in Table 2, both settings present the student with the opportunity to further their language knowledge. Though we may strictly focus on linguistic factors and gains, these may be severely affected by their experience abroad. Whether they choose a home- or dorm-stay, students will benefit from the linguistic opportunities and the availability of authentic input. Interactions with local NSs will provide the students with qualitative language input fomenting the students' need to communicate in the L2. However, it is not to discard the students' actual involvement in the language. Their motivations and expectations could significantly influence their linguistic gains in the L2, as well as their ability to interact with NSs while immersed in the culture.

#### **4 AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF STUDY ABROAD**

FLH and dorm may only present a fraction of the significant problems SA students face when engaging in these programs. Many of the students must face culture shock when traveling abroad. However, the most shocking part is when they realize their language skills are not strong enough to engage in conversation with the locals, but rather to complete basic commands. Students will face major anxiety when

expressing themselves in the TL, as well as facing the reality that their AH language lessons were just a stepping stool into the actual language and culture. While their motivation may vary, most students who engage in SA programs present a real desire to learn and connect with the host language and culture. Motivation drives the students to partake in the program, nevertheless anxiety may play into their language learning while abroad.

Anxiety plays a significant role in motivation given that it may alter the students' original motivations when learning the L2. Throughout the program, students' motivation may face several challenges, change, and, ultimately, hinder L2 learning. L2 anxiety, though common, may stop the students' progress, thus alienate the students from their original goal. Throughout this chapter, we will review both affective and motivational factors, as well as linguistic gains and the role they play in SA programs.

#### **4.1 Affective Factors: Motivation and Anxiety**

Regardless of the method of housing involved in their SA program, students participate in these programs given the extent list of motivations. Whether they need to engage with locals, improve their language skills, obtain college credits or choose to get a cultural experience abroad, SA programs encompass it all. Motivation is affected by factors that are both affectionate as well as language motivated. Throughout the program, motivation might fluctuate and, ultimately, change. Their ability and frustration when learning the L2, in addition to their environment, may influence their motivation at “the beginning of a period abroad can return with vastly different profiles at the end” (Kinging, 2009, p. 14). Expectations and motivation before the program may vary and

may also be grandiose, meaning that what the student expects is higher than the results. Kinginger (2009) explains how some students think their linguistic abilities will be better once they return home only to find a slight improvement. Also, their motivation is the most prominent instrument for improving or meeting expectations.

Students engagement and ability to connect with the host culture, in addition to the relevant experiences to each, will further influence their further studies in the language. In reality, and according to several of the articles reviewed, student's motivation may be affected by both internal and external factors, thus having no actual connection to the language or program itself, but instead focused entirely on themselves (Kinger, 2006; Hernández, 2010; Lafford, 2006). The environment surrounding the student, the authenticity of the language, in addition to the cultural shock may surpass the students' expectations and ultimately repel them from continuing their studies. According to Kinginger (2009), an example comes from Isabelli-Garcia's 2006 study where she studies the motivation and the development of Spanish language proficiency in Argentina (p.65) The students' linguistic abilities and the extent to which they became engaged with their local community highly depended on their motivation, "and whether or not they overcame their ethnocentric attitudes. (Kinger, 2009, p. 65). Whether they succeeded in setting up a friendship network, overcoming stereotypes, or connecting with the host culture structured their overseas stay and their further involvement within it. They not only improved their linguistic abilities but also gained greater intercultural awareness (Kinger, 2009, p. 65). Besides, Hernandez (2010) also mentions that if the student forms meaningful relationships with NSs while abroad, like a male student in

Buenos Aires, Argentina, there is a positive development of proficiency after spending just one semester abroad (p. 602).

Benefits do overshadow the limited negativity surrounding study abroad. The idea of partaking in one of these study-abroad programs seems enticing to every student, and most of them will report the same two motivational factors: (1) integrative motivation and; (2) instrumental motivation (Hernandez, 2010, p. 601). Hernandez (2010) defines integrative and instrumental motivation as:

- (A) An interest in learning the L2 in order to interact with the L2 group as well as (B) positive attitudes toward the native speakers (NSs) of the group and their culture.
- Instrumental motivation, in contrast, was defined as an interest in learning the L2 in order to obtain a pragmatic objective, such enhance future career opportunities (p. 601).

Nevertheless, negative experiences do happen, mainly when American students travel abroad and discover, as aforementioned, that not everyone views the USA with the admiration they expect. Many of them experience adverse reactions throughout their stay. Whereas others experience the opposite effect, these students opt to disconnect themselves from the culture and experience the SA program as another vacation. Ultimately, their motivations and expectations adapt to the circumstances experienced by the student. Hence, if the student has a circumstantial encounter with the host culture, the whole experience ends up being a fluke. Kinginger (2009) provides us with examples of her students abroad in France, who distanced themselves by either keeping a close relationship with their family back in the USA or traveling for most of

their sojourn abroad (p. 81). These students report little improvement in the TL choosing to blame the program for their lack of knowledge. However, one must emphasize that their lack of motivation to pursue the language plummeted their expectations before engaging in the program.

If we focus on Spanish-like contexts, we can see in Hernandez' (2010) article where he mentions Isabelli-Garcia's findings. Students who spent a semester abroad studying in Buenos Aires and who chose to interact with the local culture, exceeded their linguistic expectations and also gained a more globalized cultural understanding. Hispanic or Latino culture may be enticing to American students due to the proximity and availability of such, and their intentions of partaking in such a program may also have benefits when returning home. However, not every student is as successful. Some students who engaged in the same study abroad program in Argentina could not connect to the host culture given the treatment they got from males. They were "fantasized" and their lack of cultural knowledge of Argentina lead them to believe they were put in this position and disconnect from the program; thus, their expectations were not met, and motivation was at a low. Lafford (2006) mentions a similar context in her paper, reporting on a study partaken in Spain where an African-American student reported being "singled out and 'harassed' verbally for her color, especially by male Spaniards (p. 19). After this experience, the student was hesitant to leave the host family's house, ruining her chances of developing the TL and, eventually, abandoning any further studies in Spanish. Her motivation, comparable to those in Argentina, was deeply affected by her experience. Thus all future study in the language is abandoned.

Motivational factors may also be influenced by students' feelings while abroad. Students participating and exposing themselves to the TL may face several other obstacles. Anxiety is a major cause of concern for the students engaging in the program. The primary purpose of their travel abroad is to interact in the TL. Furthermore, the students need to practice their language skills to assess linguistic gains in better ways. Most students will face anxiety at some point in their career when learning a L2 (Thompson and Lee, 2014, p. 253), thus creating an obstacle for their linguistic gains. According to Thompson and Lee (2014) "anxiety, in general, is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 253). The limited exposure the students had to the language in the home country, as well as the limited knowledge of the culture may be a great cause of anxiety for the latter. Students are "thrown to the wolves" - for lack of a better term - given their limited resources in the language. "Foreign language anxiety is a result of insufficient language abilities, including those in the first language" (Thompson and Lee, 2014, p. 254). Also, their limited time - particularly short-term stays - spent abroad and overexposure to the input may cause the students major anxiety and an inability to perform in the L2.

How long does a student need to be abroad to benefit from the experience and decrease anxiety? According to Thompson and Lee (2014), "experience abroad, whether it is a long-term formal exchange program or a short-term informal experience, has been shown to help with language proficiency, both linguistically and nonlinguistically" (p. 255). SA helps the student decrease their language anxiety, particularly when they experience it daily basis. Depending on their time abroad and

their experience, they will make gains, confidence will increase, and anxiety decrease significantly. Most students will start feeling more comfortable in the L2 while abroad.

Nevertheless, it is assertive to say that a longer period spent abroad will provide greater linguistic gains and L2 capabilities. Thompson and Lee (2014) reflect on this:

Less advanced learners who spent a semester abroad in France, their perceived oral fluency improved significantly more than those participants who did not participate in the study abroad experience. Many studies indicate that longer periods abroad result in greater linguistic and nonlinguistic gains (p. 255)

Their results support the claim that linguistic gains increase depending on the time spent abroad. Language proficiency is closely linked with anxiety levels given that “language proficiency is also an important concept to consider regarding language learning anxiety” (Thompson & Lee, 2014, p. 255). When the students better perform in the language, they feel less anxious. Overall, SA helps the student mitigate an L2 and anxiety.

Incidentally, expectations do differ, and the outcomes of the program affect the students’ motivation throughout the program. In the beginning, they may seem eager to connect and learn a new language but given the experiences lived while abroad and the interaction with the host culture may change this. Participating in the program does, however, acknowledge the students’ capabilities and the circumstances they lived in. It pushes them to further their knowledge in a culture not so distant to their own, and effectively mimic future scenarios they may face at home. This gives them an inside perspective of the cultural differences and a cultural understanding that would have



been unfulfilled when studying at home. Their motivation to further study the language may be also positively affected given the experiences. The student taking part in the Argentina study would have most probably had a positive outlook and chosen to further engage in the community, language, and study.

## **4.2 Linguistic Factors**

With the growing popularity of SA programs and an influx of students opting to participate in these presents a clear advantage for both foreign language professors and the students' themselves. Motivations and expectations, as we have seen, change throughout the experience and reflect upon the students' internal struggle to cope with a new language, as well as a set of new cultural cues never before experienced by the latter. Usually, comprehension and oral productivity do increase by the student who spent time studying abroad. Although levels may vary according to the student's previous language knowledge, they usually outperform those students who choose to engage and take an immersion course AH.

Oral communication is the main component in foreign language learning. At the base of the FL language experience, comprehension provides the student with all other components needed to develop the FL. Often underestimated, oral comprehension plays a major role in the FL component given the never-ending possibilities and abilities it provides the student with. In other words, it takes a week to learn to speak or write what we can learn to read or understand in a day" (Scherer, 1952, p. 225). SA offers students with the availability of oral communication and comprehension, giving them unique access to the pure, authentic language. If we focus on the comprehensible input

available to the students when travelling abroad, the authenticity of the language provided, and the unique pronunciation, variation, accent, and experience, we find oral comprehension as a general unifying component.

Academic listening may introduce the students to the idea of the language and make their listening skills more acute; nevertheless, the authenticity of materials affects - as previously mentioned - their exposure to authentic language. The lack of exposure to natural language may have its negative effects on FL learners, particularly when embarking on sojourn abroad. Upon arrival, they may notice a lack of language knowledge, as well as linguistic cues. The main focus, as L2 professors, is that the student understands certain words of the sentence, derive a context, and analyze and figure out the meaning of the other words and sentence. However, "pertinent research indicates that many L2 learners, even those with adequate English language proficiency, have difficulty comprehending academic lectures and fail to grasp the main points of the lecture" (Jung, 2003, p. 562). Meaning that even when studying abroad L2 learners fail to derive contexts and grasp the main concept of a sentence. In addition, Jung (2003) mentions that even with proper L2 knowledge fail to identify the main ideas of a lecture and it may be due to their inability to recognize and utilize discourse-level cues (p. 562). As L2 students embark on a SA program, their contact with NSs may allow them to develop a certain affinity to the language and derive meaning. Certain processes like "top-down processing allows readers and listeners to develop expectations about text structures and meanings by using prior knowledge as part of the comprehension process" (Jung, 2003, p. 563). Prior knowledge allows the student to decipher the intended meaning, helping them succeed in the L2. Nevertheless, they still

need to decode the message and construct meaning from the input available, bottom-up process allows them to do so. “Bottom-up process involves decoding specific linguistic input” (Jung, 2003, p. 563). Ideally, a student with advanced language skills would participate in a SA program. Nevertheless, as we can distinguish, even the most advanced students present certain challenges. SA enables students’ linguistic gains to be fulfilled when activating both processes.

This literature review has shown that linguistic gains may vary on time spent studying abroad and may also reflect upon the students’ willingness to further their FL knowledge. It reflects upon their motivation and their expectation. However, it also reflects on their previous language knowledge. More and more programs do not require advanced language knowledge in order to participate in a study abroad program. Though problematic, it is also beneficial. The students benefit from authentic, native language exposure, in addition to authentic cultural cues. Their comprehension and linguistic gains are far greater than those in an AH setting. Incidentally, students’ progress leaves one thing clear: SA programs encourage students’ linguistic gains.

An array of studies reviewed (Rodrigo, 2011; Hernandez & Boero, 2017; Jochum, Rawlings, & Tejada, 2017; Kinginger, 2011) portray the students’ linguistic gains. They vary from null to a whole scale advancement on the ACTFL language pyramid. The hypothesis analyzed vary but the students’ knowledge in the FL seems steady in every study: an increase is seen. Rodrigo, in her 2011 study, analyzed Krashen’s *input hypothesis theory* in whether the language was learned “by understanding messages in the second language that utilized structures we have not yet acquired” (p. 501). The study involved 39 university students who either participated in a SA program in Spain

for 5 weeks or partook in a semester-long AH setting of a 15-week semester with 3 weekly hours of the TL being taught (Rodrigo, 2011, pp. 504-505). The students involved in the Spain study were also hosted by local families. All these students had previous knowledge of Spanish (Rodrigo, 2011, p. 505). Her findings manifest our previous discussion: the experimental group who engaged in the SA context had superior linguistic gains than that who took a semester AH (Rodrigo, 2011, p. 506). In a comprehension context, the SA group of students started at a lower level. Nonetheless, upon spending 5 weeks in Spain, they show superior gains when compared to that of the AH setting, particularly, when it comes to clitics, the verb *gustar*, and *imperfecto vs. pretérito* (Rodrigo, 2011, p. 507). The study, although, experimental, does support our hypothesis that there is an improvement of L2 grammatical structures when participating in a SA. These students gained a more rounded understanding of the Spanish culture, as well as a more defined, solid grammatical base. The students' exposure to authentic language in an authentic setting benefitted their linguistic gains. Five weeks abroad had equal - if not more - gains in comprehension and oral production than those studying 15 weeks AH. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the authenticity of the input for those studying abroad led them to recognize social cues otherwise unbeknownst to them that are instilled in the - in this case - Spanish culture.

Students' engaging in these SA programs are usually highly motivated before partaking on the adventure. However, even the most experienced and advanced students often do not know how to take full advantage of the SA environment and to further develop linguistics abilities (Hernandez, Boero, 2017, p. 390). Although more and more students choose to engage in a SA program, most of them choose a short-

term stay abroad. Nevertheless, gains can be seen, even though there is a certain uncertainty as to how much these students gain linguistically by choosing a short-term program (Hernandez & Boero, 2017, p. 390). So, the question lies if they do develop pragmatic competence when choosing to partake in these short-stay SA programs. According to Hernandez and Boero (2017), explicit, class-based pragmatic instruction is the most successful method found to promote L2 learners' pragmatic development (p. 390). Pragmatics can be defined as "the branch of linguistics dealing with language in use and the contexts it is used, including such matters as deixis, the taking of turns in conversation, text organization, presupposition, and implication" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). In essence, pragmatics is at the base of SA. Throughout this study, we can deduce that the pragmatic gains by the student who chooses to participate in a SA program are closely linked to their motivations. As aforementioned, students' motivation varies vastly; nonetheless, most students express an interest in gaining both language and cultural knowledge: Pragmatics.

L2 comprehension and utterance is the most sought-after trait when engaging in these exchanges. Studying a language at home gives the essentials to learning it, but SA gives the student an authentic source of input and an even greater source of output given the endless chances to communicate. However, for a language to stay at a certain level, there is a need to practice. Once the SA is over, what happens to the linguistic gains? Comprehension and language productivity are, at essence, based on the need to hear utterances in the TL often. When the SA ends, is comprehension affected? In a study by Huensh and Tracy-Ventura (2017), they investigated students' performance during a year abroad in Spain and the year immediately following their stay

abroad, once participants return to their home university and are not exposed to the L2 every day (p. 275). The study shows that structures learned and improved during the first 3 months abroad are retained 8 months post-experience, but that continued time abroad is needed for the student to retain oral comprehension and fluency (Huensch & Tracy-Ventura, 2017, p. 288). Participating in these programs may give the student an advantage and peak their knowledge and comprehension of the language, however, to maintain the standard constant input is needed. The students participating in this study in Spain showed greater knowledge of the language while there, had fewer pauses between utterances (Huensch & Tracy-Ventura, 2017, p. 286). The peak of their performance remained when constantly exposed to the language. Upon returning home, though structures remained, L2 performance decreased.

Nevertheless, if we focus on the students' time spent abroad and their overall gains while abroad, we value the need for the student to interact in the foreign language. Whether they are requesting something, providing goods and services, giving information, or share an object is usually a terrifying task and causes the students' great anxiety (Hernandez & Boero, 2017, p. 391). The need to develop pragmatic competence while studying abroad is essential. However, studies show that L2 pragmatic development during a stay abroad is inconsistent and varies amongst students (Hernandez & Boero, 2017, p. 391). Hernandez and Boero (2017) give the example of American students during a semester abroad in Spain and their service encounter exchanges. These learners overused direct requests (e.g. *Quiero cambiar estos zapatos*), instead of the more appropriate indirect requests (e.g. *Quería cambiar estos zapatos*), hence confirming the lack of basic pragmatic competence even when

spending a semester abroad (pp. 391-392). However, when students were given explicit instructions on pragmatics throughout their stay, “students shifted from a preference for speaker-oriented forms to greater use of hearer-oriented and elliptical requests” (Hernandez & Boero, 2017, p 392). Thus, proving that the lack of attention to pragmatics could hinder the students’ gains while abroad. Although linguistic gains may be beneficial, the lack of pragmatics may hinder the students’ progress in the language, causing unnecessary anxiety and limiting the latter’s interactions with NSs, particularly when expressing requests.

Throughout this paper, the discussion of the benefits and disadvantages encountered abroad for students in regard to comprehension and oral fluency have been extensively discussed. However, if we consider SA, we should also envision the benefits that partaking in such a program could have on future L2 teachers. “The relationship between studying abroad and language proficiency is well documented in the foreign language literature. Yet, very few researchers have studied the effect of study abroad on current or inservice foreign language teachers, who must maintain or improve their language skills throughout the career” (Jochum, Rawlings, & Tejada, 2017, p. 28). We must envision that the students’ first step into the language is the AH FL instructor, to promote such culture and linguistic value, as well as comprehensible input is in their duties. Engaging them in a SA program is significant in providing students with the aforementioned values. SA not only provides FL teachers with the same benefits but instills in them proper language cues and pragmatics needed by the student when learning the language. Teacher self-efficacy is significant in presenting and passing those values and SA provides these instructors with valuable self-efficacy

and language gains. In their study, Jochum, Rawlings, and Tejada (2017), investigate how the experience of SA in Costa Rica “affects inservice Spanish teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy” (p. 30). Throughout their stay, the teachers reveal their confidence and linguistic gains increased. They reported “how the study abroad experience enabled the participants to better understand their Spanish-language skills and acknowledge important components of their classroom practice” (Jochum, Rawlings, & Tejada, 2017, p. 34). In addition, they reported their enlightenment as to how their Spanish language proficiency lacked knowledge. They suffered when comprehending the language and expressing themselves. This study gives us insight into the need of SA programs for foreign-language majors. One can assume the lack of pragmatics and authentic linguistic input in an AH setting flaws the FL university system. If the professor lacks the comprehensible linguistic input and output, then the student engaging in an AH setting cannot succeed. SA presents greater advantages for both the student and the teacher. It makes the FL more accessible and understandable. In addition, comprehension of the latter rises when partaking in an AH setting given the authenticity of the language taught.

However, SA instruction does present its challenges to the student. Particularly when it comes to face-to-face interaction in the L2. Students may expect classroom-like interactions. As they go onto the host country daily activities, they are confronted with limited language knowledge, their in-class activities offer little to no help when faced with NSs. As previously discussed, we encounter AH settings with a lack of authentic materials, particularly when it comes to language. Before students embark on their sojourn abroad, they are given “‘structures of expectation’ about how foreign language



interaction is supposed to play out (Kininger, 2011, p. 76). Once they are settled in the new environment many come to the realization that everyday interaction is limited, by either their lack of knowledge and comprehension, lack of cultural cues, or lack of practice. They face an unknown linguistic environment, and “they may not yet have begun to assume responsibility for the meaning and clarity of their own utterances” (Kininger, 2011, p. 76). Making their expectations flawed and full of misconceptions. Having practiced language in a classroom environment, gives them the ability to produce utterances. Nevertheless, the lack of NSs reveals that whether or not their utterances make sense, it does not matter, their target audience is students in a similar language level. Their peers may or may not be interested in learning the L2 in the classroom, and mostly communication between them will be in the L1. In addition, the only NSs in the classroom may be, in fact, the teacher whose job is to evaluate them on concepts learned, not their overall comprehension and fluency. Kininger (2011) also clarifies this when she claims that “students who have used their language only in classroom settings have experienced primarily talking with teachers” teachers’ whose mission is to help them in a situation where the form of their talk is subject to scrutiny” (p. 76). The students' capabilities in the language are limited to what is taught and produced in class, and upon arrival, they will have the same erroneous expectations. In reality, they are faced with a lack of social skills in the FL. As classroom interaction is limited to question-answer form, most students expect that from their day-to-day interactions: their shortfall. As students’ lack enough knowledge to engage in conversations, they blame the classroom setting for their insufficiency in conversation. In reality, classroom engagement and conversational activities do not provide an array

of subjects, but help students communicate in various elementary scenarios. When students are faced with NSs and run low on resources their only “familiar solution [is] to mirror the classroom practice of asking and answering semantically hollow, unmotivated questions” (Kinging, 2011, p. 77). Insufficient knowledge of the language and conversational cues puts the students in a SA context at risk. They may feel alienated or unsuccessful in their encounters axing their future L2 studies. Unfortunately, classroom environments are only fit to do so much, and authentic conversation is their downfall. Even if authentic materials and authentic language exposure is the main focus of an AH classroom setting, the limitation is greater, thus hindering the students’ further encounters with NSs.

Over time spent abroad linguistic gains in terms of comprehension and production become more prominent. As Scherer (1952) noted, comprehension is the main “ingredient” when acquiring an L2. Gradually, language acquisition becomes easier for the SA student. Initially, though, an emphasis on oral comprehension must be made. If we focus on the main component and main necessity of the students while abroad, we are empowering them in the L2. As Marques-Pascual (2011) in her study notes that learners acquire “properties of Spanish over time; different levels of acquisition develop in a lock-step or as an implicational process whereby one property must be acquired before moving on to the others” (p. 568). In other words, if we emphasize listening in the classroom, all other properties will be gradually acquired. Ultimately, producing fluent L2 speakers. If we cover the SA context, the students’ immersion in the L2 with NSs offers the student the same opportunities at a more accelerated pace. Eventually, students’ studying abroad in Spanish can more rapidly

move to more complex structures such as verb agreement morphology, null expletives, null subjects, and SV inversions (Marques-Pascual, 2011, p. 569). Comprehension thus enables students to complete simple tasks and requests at ease. In addition, the everyday exposure to the language validates their efforts and productivity in the language, thus further developing their L2 skills.

If we reflect on SA programs, we can determine the various advantages and disadvantages the latter poses on students and L2 comprehension. Whether we validate the program as successful in terms of student engagement, one thing is certain: linguistic gains - though minor - will be made. Through the many advantages, we can determine points where the program could improve. Nevertheless, many of those are out of the control of the professor - and even the student. By exposing the student to broad linguistic input, we invite them to participate and engage in the L2, breaking down additional barriers they had before engaging in the program. Whereas the advantages are various, the disadvantages are usually a minor misstep - sometimes tragic. Unfortunately, motivational factors arise regardless of efforts, and it is up to the student to determine how they face the situation. Nevertheless, there is no dispute on the many advantages SA presents in terms of linguistic factors. Overall, regardless of the many disadvantages, SA presents the students with unique opportunities of language and cultural immersion unprecedented in an AH setting.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

In summary, SA opens up doors for students to better perform in the L2. Many factors may influence their linguistic gains in comprehension and production. Language proficiency in the L2 is dependent upon many factors. Amongst them, we can perceive

that the L2 and SA experience reflects on the opportunities and attitudes the student had while abroad. Second language acquisition (SLA) is dependent on variables out of the control of the foreign language professors. Whether the students' comprehension in the L2 increases, it is reflective of the students' time while abroad. Their housing experience, motivation and anxiety levels, and ability to attest to social cues. While we try to focus our attention on language teaching, it is erroneous. Language learning happens in an immersion context with a constant outpour of authentic, comprehensible input. AH experience provides an L2 learning environment; nevertheless, as determined throughout this paper, AH learners do not produce as many gains in the L2 as SA participants. Whether it is due to the idea that the base of foreign language learning is comprehension, SA studies have further confirmed the idea. SA immerses the students in the language and immersion in the language provides the student with that linguistic base.

Emotions can greatly influence students' SA and L2 production. McGregor (2014) best describes the situation "tales of individual study abroad experiences are frequently brimming with positive memories as well as emotionally destabilizing encounters" (p. 109). Each experience is unique, comparable to language acquisition where each student learns at their own pace. Their own experiences affect their further language knowledge as well as involvement in the language. Not to undermine SA programs given the vast resources in the L2 these provide. The students learning Spanish in these contexts innately acquire the language when exposed to it daily. Their experience whether good or bad is irrelevant given that their L2 exposure is significant, so the student will have some linguistic gains, though depending on their time spent abroad.

Throughout this thesis, SA is presented as a great opportunity for students - either in foreign language courses or not - to engage in. They not only provide with essential linguistic gains but a rather vast list of possibilities, such as cultural awareness and language-specific cues. By partaking in studies in Hispanic countries, students gain experience to further develop it when encountering Spanish-speakers in America. Though students' ultimate expectations can vary dramatically, SA helps them interpret and achieve a different language. Their motivations may vary, but their ultimate goal of experiencing life abroad is achieved. Linguistic gains may vary and develop based on three components: (1) motivation, (2) expectations, (3) experience. These three components attest for all SA participants. Linguistic gains, in essence, depend on these. Communication, ultimately, is our tool. It allows us to express our emotions, wants, and needs. Comprehension is its base. Comprehension is a fundamental element in language acquisition. It allows for all linguistic elements to become language.

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